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Introduction

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Introduction

Linda Collinge-Germain

1 The thrust of the research on the short story conducted over the past fifteen years in the CRILA Research Center has been the poetics of the short story, in other words, the specificity of the short story as genre, and we were pleased in this respect to have Charles E. May as a keynote speaker in our research center two years ago. Most recently the Center has studied the relation between the image and the short story, and Liliane Louvel's keynote address to the center's conference on the Image and the Short Story held in 2010 analyzed the "strong affinity between the short story and the visual," taking into special consideration the unity of effect as defined by Poe, Valerie Shaw's suggestion that "by careful contrivance, the idea [becomes] an image," and John McGahern's view that "a central image condenses the whole story" (19, 24).

2 During the conference, two participants studied the dynamics between the short story and cinema, a specific visual medium. Ailsa Cox analyzed the "visual and cinematic" in a story by Elizabeth Bowen, noting in her preliminary remarks that Bowen herself drew attention to the importance of instantaneity. Bowen's "emphasis on instantaneity," said Cox, "identifies the short story's chronotopic affinity with the boundless present, an affinity shared with cinematic form, in which narrative unfolds in the moment of being" (49). Cox also noted that "film narrative, like narrative in the modern short story, is elliptical and elusive; meaning often lies in the gaps between what is said and what is seen" (56). Michelle Ryan-Sautour looked at the "cinematographic image" in Angela Carter's story "John Ford's '*Tis Pity She's a Whore*'" and concluded that "Carter's high-flown experimentation with intermediality in this story [the eponymous John Ford being a conflation of the 17th Jacobean playwright and the 20th century Western filmmaker] creates politically charged effects, using the intensity, density, and multilayered quality of short-story discourse to heighten the reader's exercise of his/her imagination" (71).

3 These studies, centered on cinematic qualities of short-story writing, were a transition of sorts to the CRILA's concentration on film adaptations of short stories. Three one-day conferences on the Short Story and Cinema were held between 2010 and 2012. The first took place at the Sorbonne in June 2010 and was organized by Emmanuel

Vernadakis of the CRILA, Irène Bessière of the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme de Paris and Jean Bessière of the Sorbonne research group CERC. The second was held in June 2011 in Versailles and was organized by Emmanuel Vernadakis and Alice Clark-Wehinger of the CRILA and Taïna Tuhkunen of the Suds d'Amériques research group at the University of Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines. Robert Olen Butler, short-story writer and author of the essay "Cinema of the Mind," republished here, was the guest speaker. Finally, in March 2012, Morgane Jourdren of the CRILA organized the third one-day conference, held at the University of Angers. Guest speakers were Ra Page, short-story editor and filmmaker, along with Maylis de Kerangal, French author of the short story "Ni fleurs ni couronnes," and Charlotte Erlih, the filmmaker who adapted the story into a film. The present volume contains selected papers from these three short conferences.

4 In her recent theoretical work on adaptations, Linda Hutcheon concedes that "when most of us consider the move from print to performance, it is usually the common and familiar phenomenon of the adaptation of novels that comes to mind" (39). Indeed her twenty-three-page bibliography contains scores of studies devoted to adaptations of novels (as well as to adaptations of Shakespeare) and not a single reference to the adaptation of short stories. Stephanie Harrison's 2005 critical anthology of thirty-five short stories which have been adapted into films is a useful tool in bringing the subject to the fore and Adrian Hunter, in his *Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English* (2007), reminds us of the affinity between cinema and short story:[1]

> In the classic accounts of the short story–by Bowen, H.E. Bates, and Frank O'Connor–one repeatedly encounters the idea that the short story is somehow 'up to speed' with the realities of modern life. Bates, for example[2] citing Bowen, claims that the form is a 'child of this century' in the same way that cinema is. Like film, it conducts narrative not by extended exposition, as the novel does, but 'by a series of subtly implied gestures, swift shots, moments of suggestion, an art in which elaboration and above all explanation are superfluous and tedious.' (3)

5 Even Linda Hutcheon's remarks about the adaptation of novels indirectly and perhaps unknowingly are of interest to the study of the short story and cinema and resonate with the remarks in the previous quote:

> [A] novel, in order to be dramatized, has to be distilled, reduced in size, and thus, inevitably, complexity. [...] Most reviewers saw this cutting [of a novel for a film] as a negative, as subtraction, yet when plots are condensed and concentrated, they can sometimes become more powerful. (36)

6 This observation is interesting in the sense that it first of all associates condensation and "powerfulness", an association which precisely defines the short story. Short-story writers commenting on their craft repeatedly evoke the importance of concision. The following extracts from interviews by short-story writers are telling in this respect:[3]

> A story must never explain, it must enact and suggest. - VS Pritchett
> Description is part of the superfluous that I was mentioning about the novel. I find it useless and boring. An atmosphere develops on its own, around the story, somewhat magically. If *you* see, so does the reader, a few suggestions suffice. - Mavis Gallant (my translation)[4]
> One should really leave something for the reader to construct, something individual so that every reader should get something special for himself. - Muriel Spark
> One of the things that I am at home with in Chekhov is the degree to which he trusts his reader to travel beyond the given, to collaborate with him in the making of his stories. - Tobias Wolff

7 A.S. Byatt's remark below even additionally parallels McGahern's view presented earlier that "a central image condenses the whole story":

> I started seeing things in a very condensed clear way, as images. I start making it into a thing much more like a poem, which is a story, and it can have people attached to it who don't have to have immensely complex characters or histories. - A.S. Byatt (20)

8 Clearly, powerfulness is essential to these writers and derives from condensation. Hutcheon's remark, while making this association ("when plots are condensed and concentrated, they can sometimes become more powerful") and therefore suggesting that condensation is a positive value, poses, albeit unwittingly, the problem of adapting a short story into a feature-length film, for such an adaptation often paradoxically results in *expansion*, the inverse movement of the "distillation" required for adapting a novel.

9 We might wonder then to what extent filmmakers adapting short stories take into consideration this paradoxical situation. In his adaptation of John McGahern's short story "Korea," Cathal Black finds an interesting objective correlative for the unsaid, the invisible part of the iceberg, in a cage of writhing eels which are plunged below the surface of the lake that the young protagonist's father has fished for a living. The concision in McGahern's story is extreme (Douglas Cowie's analysis views the story as a poem), an effective means to express the "hidden violence"[5] lying under the surface of the words spoken for example by the protagonist's father when he excitedly tells his neighbour that Luke Moran's family received money from the American government after he was killed as a soldier in Korea. Though Cathal Black expands McGahern's story, he nevertheless repeatedly and almost subliminally inserts the image of the cage of eels, subtly evoking the hidden violence in the unsaid. Articles in the present volume take into consideration the aesthetics of concision or suggestion in film adaptations, my own as I consider Siodmak's use of revealing and concealing in his *film noir* adaptation of "The Killers," and Michelle Ryan-Sautour's as she studies Neil Jordan's adaptation of Carter's Wolf Tales. She says the following:

> It is telling that Michael Dare, in his introduction to an interview with Neil Jordan, emphasizes the literary structure of the film: 'In order to understand what was going on stylistically, I found myself pretending I was reading a short story rather than watching a movie' (Dare para. 5). The narrative structure draws the spectator into the active role of piecing the puzzle together. The openness and emphasis on the reader's participation is therefore equally present in the film version of the tales, although in different ways. On numerous occasions the scenes are filmed through the trees, as if to place the spectator in the role of observer, almost voyeur, as if to replace the absent voice of the didactic narrator present in the stories [...].

10 Both Siodmak and Jordan, like their literary counterparts, use techniques which solicit spectator/reader participation. Ra Page, in his article "Reveal to Reel," argues that one of the difficulties in adapting short stories to the screen is the cinema's specificity of showing as opposed to telling; he studies "the deep-seated tension within cinematic story-telling: the need to withhold information (in order to keep the viewer guessing) versus the inevitable tendency of the visual image to give too much away, to show everything."

11 Adrian Hunter's aforementioned study of the short story genre also draws attention to the visual; he argues that the modern short story and the cinema are both products and expressions of modern life and its technological advancements, one of the expressions

of modernity being its "privileging of the visual over other sorts of experience" (46).[6] Indeed, as most theoretical studies of film adaptation remind us,[7] George Bluestone's 1957 seminal essay established a link between statements made by the writer Joseph Conrad and by the filmmaker D.W. Griffith based on the visual. Conrad wrote, in the Preface to his 1897 novella: "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the powers of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel–it is, before all, to make you see" (5). Sixteen years later, in 1913, Griffith declared: "The task I am trying to achieve is above all to make you see." (qtd. in Jacobs, 119). In the present volume, the writer's interest in the visual is corroborated in Robert Olen Butler's essay "Cinema of the Mind" where he draws attention not only to the writer's willingness to "make you see," as Conrad put it, but also to the use by writers of cinematographic-type techniques such as equivalents of establishing shots or close-up shots. He postulates: "When you read a work of literature, the characters and the setting are evoked as images, as a kind of dream in your consciousness." He bases his demonstration in part on Hemingway's stories, and indeed Hemingway's writing has been defined as "cinematic." Jacques Pothier applies Butler's hypothesis to the works of Faulkner, an author avowedly influenced by the cinema, studying for example the effects of visual juxtaposition, similar to those obtained by a dissolve in the cinema. Gilles Menegaldo, in his article, postulates that Poe's writing in "The Fall of the House of Usher" is conducive to adaptation to a visual medium: the gothic image of the isolated and decaying house, the tarn/mirror, the interior decoration of the house and its lighting effects, and the parallel drawn between the house and its owner which is conducive to juxtapositional editing for example. He further argues, as does Jocelyn Dupont in reference to Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut,* that the cinema, by its use of magically fascinating appearing and disappearing images, places the spectator in a state of semi-consciousness, a dream-like state similar to the hypnagogic state, between waking and sleep, which Poe refers to in "The Pit and the Pendulum" and which Arthur Schnitzler conjures up in the evocatively entitled *Traumnovelle* (*Dreamstory* in English), a "dream in your consciousness," as Butler would put it. Similarly, Alice Clark-Wehinger studies Tennessee Williams' intermedial experimentation with a screen device incorporated into one of his early versions of the memory play *The Glass Menagerie* as a means of evoking a character's "hallucinatory images" for example, the screen device on stage serving as the scene of memory or perhaps even as "l'autre scène" (the other stage) to use Octave Mannoni's expression.

12 The current issue begins with theoretical considerations by a writer, Robert Olen Butler, and a short story editor and filmmaker, Ra Page. The articles which follow are studies of particular works by short story writers and/or filmmakers: Poe, Schnitzler, Hemingway, Faulkner, Williams, Carter; Siodmak, Epstein, Corman, Rapper, Jordan, Kubrick and stage director Jacques Nichet. The studies consider writers' attraction to the visual or cinematographic, filmmakers' attraction to literature (nearly *all* of Kubrick's films are adaptations of literary works), the specificities of each medium, the synergy created between them, and the relationship between reader/spectator and text. The studies could be considered as adopting the position promoted by Stephanie Harrison in the introduction to her anthology:

> Rather than viewing a film adaptation as a cultural replacement for a story or novel, it seems closer to the truth to view each work as a variation on a theme [...]. It may, in fact, be Altman who has come closest to pointing the way for us, when he

said, with admirable simplicity, "In the end the film is there and the stories are there and one hopes there is a fruitful interaction."(xviii-xix)

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NOTES

1. See as well Ailsa Cox's remarks above on Bowen's writing about cinema.
2. H.E. Bates, *The Modern Short Story: A Critical Survey*, London: Thomas Nelson, 1941 (21).
3. See *JSSE* issue n° 41 for interviews of short-story writers conducted by members of the CRILA research center and the introduction to it in which these quotes are brought together.
4. "La description fait partie de ce superflu que j'évoquais à propos du roman. Je la trouve inutile et ennuyeuse. Une atmosphère se dégage d'elle-même, elle se crée autour du récit, comme par magie. Si vous voyez, le lecteur voit aussi, quelques indices suffisent".
5. "Ireland was always a very violent society, and, like most things there, it was very hidden there as well." Interview of John McGahern by Linda Collinge and Emmanuel Vernadakis, *Journal of the Short Story in English*, 41 (Autumn 2003): 133.
6. See "Part II The modernist short story, Introduction: 'complete with missing parts.'"

7. One of the most recent being *Etudier l'adaptation filmique* by Laurent Mellet and Shannon Wells-Lassagne, Rennes: PUR, 2010.

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Linda Collinge-Germain is an Associate Professor at the University of Angers where she teaches English language and literature and is an active member of the Centre de Recherches Interdisciplinaires en Langue Anglaise. She is the author of *Beckett traduit Beckett: de* Malone meurt *à* Malone Dies, *l'imaginaire en traduction* (Droz, 2000), a study of Beckett as self-translator, and has also published articles on the subject which have appeared in *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui* or thematic collections. Her areas of interest are the bilingual works of Samuel Beckett, reception theory and more currently, cultural in-betweenness in short-story writing, and film adaptations of short stories as a form of translation. She was co-editor of the *Journal of the Short Story in English* from 1997 to 2012 and has been editor since 2012.